



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release JANUARY 27, 1958

#### LONG VIGIL BRINGS NO SIGN OF REPORTED WHOOPING CRANE STRAGGLER

After "keeping a light in the window" for more than a month, the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service has ceased to expect the arrival of a thirty-second whooping crane at the Aransas, Texas, National Wildlife Refuge, Service officials said today.

Hence the world's whooper population as of January 1958 is 31, just the same as it was in mid-November 1957. Of these, five are in captivity--four in New Orleans and one in San Antonio; and 26 are free--24 on the Refuge and two on nearby Matagorda Island.

When migration time came last spring there were 24 wild whoopers on or near the Aransas Refuge. Twenty-one of these started the long flight to the nesting grounds near Great Slave Lake in Canada. By mid-November last year 24 whoopers had returned to Aransas. But since this number included four youngsters it was obvious that one adult was missing.

Unverified reports from time to time told of a lone whooper making its way southward. Another report on November 17 said a lone whooper was seen in Canada. It is not unusual for a straggler to arrive weeks after the others have settled on their wintering grounds. In 1952 it was not until the week before Christmas that the last whooper leisurely landed on the Gulf marshes. Hence, until recently some faint hope had been held that the missing bird might yet reach winter quarters.

Despite the disappointment in the long vigil, 1957 will go down in whooper history as a good year, marked by many instances of a growing awareness of the plight of the almost vanished race and a sincere desire for its recovery, Fish and Wildlife Service officials said. The year was highlighted by the successful rearing of two young birds in captivity at the New Orleans Zoo. This is the first time that man with all of his science has been able to do for a whooper chick that which nature does as a matter of course in the wild.

The number of cranes lost since last spring is placed at two--one of those which remained on the Gulf and which died on the Aransas Refuge, and the one which went north and which failed to return--a good record when all the dangers of a 5,000-mile round trip migration to the nesting grounds are considered.

Records of the whooper population on the wintering grounds have been kept since 1938-1939. The year by year fluctuations of the flock are shown below, the first figure indicating the total number of wild whoopers and the figure in parentheses the number of young: 1938-1939--14 (4); 1939-1940--22 (6); 1940-1941--26 (5); 1941-1942--15 (2); 1942-1943--19 (4); 1943-1944--21 (5); 1944-1945--18 (3); 1945-1946--17 (4); 1946-1947--25 (3); 1947-1948--31 (6); 1948-1949--30 (3) two captives on refuge not counted; 1949-1950--34 (4) two captives on refuge not counted; 1950-1951--32 (4); 1951-1952--23 (5); 1952-1953--23 (2); 1953-1954--24 (3); 1954-1955--21 (0); 1955-1956--28 (8); 1956-1957--24 (2); 1957-1958--26 (4).

x x x